

# THREE ARTS CLUB

Preliminary Summary of Information  
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Commission on Chicago Historical  
and Architectural Landmarks

THREE ARTS CLUB  
1300 North Dearborn Parkway  
Chicago, Illinois

Architects: Holabird and Roche

Date of construction: 1914

The Three Arts Club in Chicago is the last survivor of 2 groups of independently organized and managed residential facilities which provided a safe, comfortable, and economical place for young women to live while studying the arts in the big city. Chicago's Three Arts Club was founded in December, 1911, a month after a meeting between representatives of local art, music, and drama schools, wealthy society women interested in promoting the arts, and several women including Jane Addams, who were involved in social reform movements. The guiding force behind this meeting was Miss Gwenthelyn Jones, a Lake Forest woman whose father, David E. Jones, had made his fortune through copper mining in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Miss Jones was named president of the new organization, and by January, 1912, the organization was chartered and the first board meeting held.

The board obtained a house at 1614 North LaSalle Street which was furnished and opened to residents in September, 1912. Young women, aged 17 to 30, were eligible to live there, provided they could furnish the club with three references: one from a teacher of the art which the potential club member studied, attesting to her sincerity in pursuing a career; a character reference from someone in the community in which the potential club member lived; and a financial reference, not to state how much money she had but rather to attest to her financial integrity. The club has always been a not-for-profit institution, supported by contributions as well as the fees, always kept low, paid by the resident members.

The present home of the Three Arts Club was built by David Jones and given, on its completion in 1914, to his daughter as a gift; Miss Jones presented the building to the organization's Board of Trustees several years later. Mr. Jones commissioned the firm of Holabird and Roche to design the club house, and the result was a four-story brick structure that accommodated 114 residents. The rectangular building was built around a central courtyard, with communal rooms on the first floor and bedrooms and bathrooms on the upper three floors. All rooms have windows opening onto Dearborn or Goethe Street or onto the courtyard. The exterior of the club is enhanced by narrow brick buttresses at the corners and by the Byzantine-inspired front entrance. A row of short columns in front of the fourth floor windows, as well as some elements of interior ornamentation, also owe their form to aspects of Byzantine design. Tall round-arched French windows are used on the first floor on both the Dearborn and Goethe Street facades. The entrance too follows the pattern established by the arched windows although its three arches are not of equal size. Here, the middle arch contains the front doors, set between a pair of columns with fluted terra-cotta shafts topped by molded terra-cotta capitals. The sloping surfaces of these capitals are carved with interlacing foliate forms on which are superimposed lyres and artists' palattes, one symbol on each side of each capital. A frieze running behind the capitals, along the wall above the doors and two flanking windows, is molded

into similar intertwining curvilinear patterns. Set within each of the three arches, above the frieze, is a mosaic panel done in the Byzantine style, particularly as found in the ancient buildings of Ravenna in Italy. The two outer panels each depict a pair of birds under a tree with the word "pulcritudo (beauty)" in one and the word "verus (truth)" in the other. The central panel has a geometric design of circles with the words "musica", "fabula," and "pictura," or music, drama, and painting, worked into the design along with the traditional symbols of the three arts: lyre, mask, and palette.

The second- and third-floor windows are plain, unornamented rectangles. On the fourth floor, the windows are grouped together in threes or fours, recessed within a larger rectangular form, and columns, with terra-cotta shafts in alternating fluted and spiral forms, are placed in front of the mullions separating the panes. The capitals of these columns are similar to those found at the front entrance. Above the fourth floor windows, there is a simple brick cornice, projecting slightly over the wall plane. One additional element of ornamentation on the facade of the club is somewhat incongruous with the Byzantine entrance. Between the windows of the first floor are five panels sculpted in low relief, depicting women in Greek dress carrying urns, each in a different pose. These panels were copied from a mid-sixteenth century work, the *Fontaine Des Innocents*, carved by Jean Goujon, a prominent French sculptor of the period. Whether the panels were part of the original architectural scheme of the club or were a gift from a friend of the organization and added later is not certain.

All the social rooms on the first floor have French doors leading to the central courtyard. A living room, with three smaller sitting rooms off its eastern side, runs across the front of the building. It leads into the tea room which extends along the Goethe Street side of the building where it meets the dining hall and kitchen. The dining room runs along the west side of the building and joins the ballroom which covers the north side of the club and opens into the foyer. The living room is a large, wide space containing two grand pianos and a fireplace at the center of its eastern wall. This fireplace is back-to-back with a second fireplace in one of the three sitting rooms. The tea room, much narrower than the living room, has a painted brick floor, a vaulted ceiling, and hanging light fixtures loosely based on Byzantine forms. The dining room also has a kind of Byzantine ornamentation on the walls and ceiling. The ballroom, with a wooden floor and raised platform along one side, is used not only for parties but also for recitals and concerts given by the residents.

The Three Arts Club was very successful in attracting young women from many states and later from several foreign countries. For a few years, two houses on State Parkway served as club annexes for additional students; these were closed in 1921. In 1962, the club was instrumental in the establishment of the Foundation for Arts Scholarships, an organization with its own board of directors, which helps fulfill two needs perceived by the women who ran the Three Arts Club. The first is to provide financial assistance to young women who wish to study one of the arts, and the second is to provide opportunities for students to perform before audiences and to exhibit their work. A number of the women currently living at the club have received scholarships from the Foundation.

In recent years, as it has become acceptable for young women to live on their own in the city, the club membership suffered a decline. However, within the last year, under the initiative of a new director, the number of members has risen to the capacity of the club building, now ninety residents. The club

provides a place in which likeminded students can concentrate on their work, in a supportive atmosphere, without spending time and energy making their own living arrangements. The club is located within the Gold Coast area, with easy access to the schools at which club residents are studying. The club building was carefully designed to serve its function without any display of extravagance in its form, materials, or ornament. It is nonetheless an attractive structure, particularly for the internal courtyard with its central fountain which gives light and space to all the rooms facing on it. Built at a time when higher education was becoming more accessible to women, the Three Arts Club facilitated the pursuit of education in Chicago. The club is also an example, along with the Tree Studio Building, built in 1894 and to which two annexes were added in 1912-13, and the Fine Arts Building, opened in 1898, of specialized buildings designed to meet the needs of artists. This new focus of attention indicated the growing appreciation and acceptance of the arts as an important part of city life and as a worthwhile pursuit for young people. The Three Arts Club is a unique building, an integral part of Dearborn Parkway and the larger Gold Coast area, and it has a special part in the cultural development of the city.



